In his book *The Fermented Man*, Derek Dellinger greets the reader in the center of a battlefield. The war is not entirely new: it has been slowly escalating since the industrialization of the United States and, in a sense, has “gone nuclear” with the advent of cheap antibiotics and brightly colored cleansing products proudly touting the capacity to kill anything on touch. Derek Dellinger, a home-brew and craft beer writer, calls this war the “war on microbes.”

Dellinger’s experiment, the result of which is *The Fermented Man*, is an affront to those who encourage the modern American war on microbes. For an entire year he ate only fermented foods: a year of exploring the microbes, germs, and molds that Americans have been taught to fear. Rather than outright dying, Dellinger completed his year of half-microbial-digested foods and had the strength left to write a book about it.

*The Fermented Man* begins, essentially, with a question: how many fermented foods can you name? If you got beyond bread, beer, and wine, you are doing better than most. If you added cheese to the list, even better. Salami? Yogurt? Pickles? Of course there are kimchi, kvass, and kombucha. There are also coffee and cacao. You forgot to mention the Greenland shark, buried for three months and perfectly rotted for consumption.

What Dellinger discovers through his year of exploration is that although you can find several fermented foods in the supermarket, they are the malnourished half-cousins rather than the wholesome and flavorful ferments that have sustained humans across cultures since the Paleolithic era. Dellinger describes his trips to the store almost as fever dreams, filled with vacuum-sealed pasteurized sauerkraut stripped of its flavor, and yogurt packed so full with sugar and artificial flavoring that it is hardly recognizable. Dozens of synthetic chemicals have been added to our food to keep it preserved, while marketing departments and food producers have obscured our oldest method of preservation. Sure, Wonder Bread is fermented, but it is a far cry from the hardy loaf of bread that ancient cultures would gather around to eat and find succor.

In addition to describing his unusual diet and the various methods of pickling vegetables, Dellinger dives deeply into diverse topics that surround fermentation and microbial life, such as the “miasma theory,” which led researchers on a chase to create a perfectly sterile environment, raising animals and even children in completely sterilized environments to see what benefits there were, if any, to microbes. Dellinger also covers the danger of antibiotics in the current industrialized meat farming system, and how that practice leads to greater resilience among the killer microbes. The question that seems to irk Dellinger above all, however, is how, in spite of the modern food industry’s attempts to forget traditional fermentation, yogurt became so popular as to become ubiquitous in every supermarket across America.

Dellinger brings up good questions about the way we view food, and does a fine job examining how our biases have been crafted by marketing departments. Dellinger need not go farther than the margarine uprising in the fifties and sixties that branded butter, a staple in the American diet, as unhealthy. Since then, butter has not been able to regain its status on the dinner table; the marketing for margarine appears to have left an indelible stain on butter in the American imagination.

As for his experiment in eating, Dellinger is dedicated, even going as far as Iceland to try Hákarl—a fermented Greenland shark. Beyond his trip to Iceland and his home experiments with Japanese Koji spores, there was not much else besides endless vegetable chopping and grilled cheese sandwiches. Dellinger was right to leave out how truly mundane it could get eating grilled cheese, salami, and pickles every day for a year,
but *The Fermented Man* felt somewhat constrained by the framing device that was built into its premise. The book was part memoir, part haphazard experiment, and part exploration of a food production system that has alienated us from our nutrients. In being all three, the book just misses being enough of any one of those.

When Dellinger makes it to Iceland to explore how they do fermentation, he gives us a memorable scene in an improbable setting, and his humorous writing and adventurous spirit leave the reader wanting to learn of different fermentations and the cultures that have created them. When Dellinger describes the personal and professional difficulties he experienced during his year, the reader wants to identify with him, wants to struggle alongside him and grapple with his transitions. When Dellinger writes about the food industry and its gelding of the fermented foods we have developed over centuries, the reader is hungry for more of his sharp analysis. *The Fermented Man* is not quite able to satisfy any of those cravings, wanting for additional research, or travel, or self-reflection.

What *The Fermented Man* does provide, however, is a humorous voice discussing vital changes in the way we eat food, and doing so under the premise of a unique and comical experiment. Dellinger never takes himself too seriously, constantly poking fun at his experiment, and his book reflects his passion for learning. It is easy to like Dellinger through his writing, and the book offers some insights into the history and nature of our food that will stick with the reader long after they have finished reading.

—William Barton

**Meat Culture**

*Edited by Annie Potts*  
*Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2016*  
xii + 295 pp. $152 (hardcover); $45 (cloth)

Meat is a staple in the Western diet and occupies an increasing share of caloric intake globally. Annie Potts assembles fourteen chapters that present a rather comprehensive examination of “meat culture,” the role that meat and eating animals plays in Western societies. Not being divided into parts, this structure constantly connects and reinforces previous themes without becoming repetitive. Each contribution critically interrogates social, cultural, and ethical aspects of eating animals with a particular focus on meat. The book’s greatest strength is exposing that the morality of eating meat/animals is almost entirely nonexistent in ethical discussions of many facets of culture and society. This review centers on several examples from the text that illustrate this phenomenon.

Nik Taylor and Jordan McKenzie examine discourse surrounding the European horsemeat scandal of 2013, where horsemeat was being sold as cow meat. They note how discussion revolved around the issue of trust in the meat industry, with the meat industry itself remaining unquestioned, and discussion of meat eating entirely absent. This relates to Jacqueline Dalziell and Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel’s chapter in terms of a silence over fundamental practices concerning animal slaughter. Dalziell and Wadiwel examine discourse and symbolism in a news story about live animal exportation from Australia to Indonesia. Like Taylor and McKenzie, they find that although the event created media discourse that persisted several years after the event, there was no examination of humans’ “right” to kill animals. Instead, rhetoric revolved around the how and who of slaughter. Tobias Linné and Helena Pedersen report on a springtime release of dairy cows on a Swedish farm. In their observations, while the welfare of the cows was the focal point of the publicity event, they note the absence of any ethical framing of keeping and using cows for milk consumption.

In an altogether different approach, artist Yvette Watt discusses how farmed animals are generally underrepresented in art, especially recently as animal and environmental themes and subjects in art have proliferated. Watt finds that most artists claim to care about animals and consider art to be an important vehicle by which to engage with and drive social and political issues concerning animals. Yet, art featuring farmed animals in ways that would highlight their sentience and individuality are lacking. Watt speculates this is because “featuring farm animals in their artwork [in these ways] would create a sense of personal conflict in these artists” (p.175). Again, a cultural blind spot is exposed when it comes to farmed animals via their representation in art, or lack thereof.

The last few chapters become more theoretical and philosophical. In a particularly interesting passage, Karen Davis references the 2013 *Personhood Beyond the Human* conference where multiple scientists suggested that human robotic creations may be more likely to be granted legal personhood—and therefore moral consideration—before animals. This is a dramatic representation of meat culture at its most stark. The suggestion that human-made objects could gain protection from harm, suffering, and/or murder before some of the most violently treated, sentient, living subjects (farmed animals) speaks to the cultural embeddedness of eating animals. In light of this, the silence of ethical animal discourse is hardly surprising.